

Purchasing Officer interview questions

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What to expect

Purchasing officer interviews usually test both systems literacy and commercial judgement. Employers want to see that you can follow procurement policy, negotiate with suppliers and keep purchase records accurate when finance and operations are both watching.

- **Technical and systems:** Questions on SAP or Oracle, Excel, purchase orders, three way matching and invoice reconciliation.
- **Behavioural:** Past examples of supplier negotiation, discrepancy resolution and stakeholder management.
- **Scenario and judgement:** Supply delays, price increases, urgent orders or requests that conflict with procurement policy.
- **Stakeholder and supplier facing:** How you communicate with vendors, finance and internal teams when priorities clash.
- **Process and compliance:** How you apply procurement policy, approval limits and record keeping requirements.

A typical process starts with a short phone or video screen with recruitment or the purchasing manager. The main interview often includes a purchasing manager and a finance or operations stakeholder. You may be asked to complete a short Excel or procurement system exercise, then discuss scenario based questions. Some employers run a second interview focused on supplier negotiation or policy compliance.

1. Walk me through how you process a purchase order from requisition through to invoice matching.

Why they ask

This is a core process question. Interviewers want to see you understand controls and handoffs, not just raise an order.

How to structure your answer

Use a chronological walk through. Start with the requisition and approval, explain how you check budget and specification, then cover supplier selection or quote comparison, raising the purchase order in SAP or Oracle, receiving goods, matching the invoice and closing the file. Mention who you speak to at each step and how you handle exceptions.

Example answer

"When a requisition comes through, I first check that it has the right approval and that the budget code is valid. I confirm the specification with the requester and look at whether we have a preferred supplier or need to compare quotes. If quotes are needed, I evaluate price, delivery and terms, then raise the purchase order in SAP with the agreed details. Once goods arrive, I match the goods received note to the purchase order and the invoice. If there is a mismatch, I contact the supplier or the receiving team to fix it before the payment run. I keep the requester updated if anything changes."

2. Tell me about a time you negotiated with a supplier when price or delivery terms changed.

Why they ask

Supplier negotiation is central to the role. Interviewers want evidence you can hold a commercial conversation without damaging the relationship.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR. Set the situation, the change, your task, the specific actions you took in the negotiation, and the result in terms of cost, delivery or relationship.

Example answer

"A supplier we used for packaging advised a price increase and a longer lead time. I asked for a breakdown of the increase and checked whether volumes or order timing could be adjusted. I also looked at an alternative supplier to understand the market rate. I proposed a twelve month price hold on the highest volume line and a slightly later delivery window for the slower moving items. The supplier agreed, and we kept the relationship while avoiding an immediate cost increase across the whole range."

3. A key supplier advises a two week delay on a critical item. What do you do?

Why they ask

This tests judgement under pressure, prioritisation and communication.

How to structure your answer

Use a scenario judgement structure. Acknowledge the issue, assess operational impact, identify options, communicate with stakeholders, then confirm the chosen action and follow up.

Example answer

"I would start by confirming the delay in writing and asking for the new confirmed date and any partial shipment options. Then I would check the production or operational schedule to see how critical the item is and whether we have any stock cover. I would look at alternatives such as an expedited delivery from another supplier, borrowing from another site or adjusting the order sequence. I would tell the affected manager immediately with the options and my recommendation, rather than waiting until the original delivery date. Once a plan is agreed, I would update the purchase order, monitor the new date and keep everyone informed."

4. How do you use Excel or your procurement system to monitor stock levels and forecast next quarter's orders?

Why they ask

This checks practical data skills. Interviewers want to know you can turn records into useful ordering decisions.

How to structure your answer

Describe your tools, the data you track, how you review it and how you act on signals. Use a specific example from your own work.

Example answer

"I keep a stock and usage tracker in Excel that links item codes, lead times, minimum stock levels and recent consumption. Each week I review items that are close to their reorder point and check whether there are any upcoming projects or seasonal changes that will affect demand. For quarterly forecasting, I look at the last few months of usage, adjust for known changes and flag items with long lead times to the relevant manager. In SAP I run open purchase order and goods received reports to check that what we have on order still matches what we need. If usage is trending up, I bring the order forward before we hit a shortage."

5. Describe a time you found a discrepancy between a purchase order, goods received note and invoice. How did you resolve it?

Why they ask

Three way matching and discrepancy resolution are daily parts of purchasing. This question tests attention to detail and follow through.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR. Explain the mismatch, what you checked first, who you involved, what you changed and how you prevented it from recurring.

Example answer

"I once had an invoice for a pallet of components where the price was higher than the purchase order and the goods received note showed fewer units than invoiced. I checked the original quote, the purchase order and the receiving record before contacting anyone. The supplier had applied a newer price list and the warehouse had recorded the delivery as short received. I asked the supplier for a credit note on the price difference and arranged for the missing units to be dispatched. I also asked the receiving team to note shortages on the delivery docket at the point of receipt so we could catch the issue earlier next time."

6. How do you manage internal stakeholders who want to bypass purchasing policy or split orders to avoid approval limits?

Why they ask

Purchasing officers often have to enforce process without becoming a blocker. Interviewers want to see diplomacy and policy awareness.

How to structure your answer

Use a process and stakeholder structure. Start with understanding the request, explain the policy and risk, offer a compliant path, and escalate only if needed.

Example answer

"I start by asking what they need and why the normal process feels too slow. Sometimes there is a genuine urgency or a specification issue I can solve within policy. I explain that splitting orders or bypassing approval limits creates audit and probity risks, and that it can also stop us from getting the best supplier terms. Then I offer a practical alternative, such as helping them raise a properly approved urgent order, using an existing panel supplier or consolidating the request with a forward order. If they still want to go around the process, I escalate it to my manager with the facts and the options I have already suggested."